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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Housekeepers' Chat

Thursday, March 31, 1932

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "An April Fools' Menu." Information from the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

--ooOoo--

Tomorrow, unless my calendar is deceiving me, is the annual day for jokes -- April Fools' Day or All Fools' Day, as it used to be called.

Nobody knows who started April Fools' Day. And nobody knows exactly where we acquired the custom of playing jokes on our friends on this certain day of the year. But the authorities have several theories in the matter. They tell us that from the very oldest times there have been festivities of one sort or another at this time of year in many different countries. In India, for example, there has always been the feast of Huli which ended on the last day of March. At this celebration the chief amusement was playing jokes on other people. Then, there was an old Roman festival known as the Feast of Fools which came a little earlier in the year.

In Great Britain the first of April seems to have been a time for merrimaking since ancient times but it wasn't until as late as the 18th Century that the custom of making April fools came in. Since that time, this humorous holiday has spread from country to country. In Scotland they have a custom called "hunting the gowks" on the first of April. The gowk, as I understand it, is the old Scotch word for cuckoo and the word cuckoo seems to be a term of contempt like the word fool. In France the person who is fooled on this holiday is called the April fish.

I don't know any day of the year when both children and grown-ups can have more fun. For children's parties foolish costumes, surprises of all sorts from decorations and games to food can be features. Anything different, amusing and a bit foolish will add to the fun. Wise parents will encourage such diversion to celebrate this day rather than the practical jokes that often cause more trouble than fun.

Of course, it isn't our custom to have a menu on Thursday. But the Menu Specialist has planned such a fine April Fools' Day dinner that I decided you might want it down in your notebook today all ready for tomorrow. This April Fool Dinner is all made of dishes with amusing names, to please the children and the grown-ups.

For the main dish -- Pigs in blankets. Three guesses what these are: I'll tell you. They are oysters wrapped in strips of bacon and broiled either under or over an open flame. The bacon blankets, by the way, can be fastened around the oysters with toothpicks.

With the pigs in blankets serve Duchess potatoes; Celery curls, Radish roses; Sally Lunn -- that excellent Southern hot bread, and Sunbonnet Sue salad. For dessert, Rhubarb Betty and Pinwheels.

Once again. I'll go over that menu. Pigs in blankets; Duckess potatoes; Celery curls; Radish Roses; Sally Lunn; Sonbonnett Sue salad; Rhubarb betty and Pinwheels.

Let's take up the items on that menu one by one. If you want to serve your potatoes in an elegant and aristocratic way, a way that would suit a duchess or a duke, here's the way you do it. Take riced potatoes - about 2 cups -- add butter, salt and the yolks of 3 eggs, and fold in stiffly beaten egg white. Then put this mixture in a greased baking dish, and set in a hot oven long enough to brown over the top.

Next, about those celery curls. Most people know how to fix celery curls. Cut blanched stalks of celery in pieces about 5 inches long. Then feather or slit the ends of the stalks. Now place the celery in ice cold water for an hour to crisp. The slit pieces will curl up in the cold water.

Radish roses? They are done in much the same way. Leave on each radish about one inch of the green stem. Begin at the root end and with a sharp knife make four or 5 cuts through the skin. Peel half way down. Place radishes in very cold water to crisp. Then drain them. The red peeling will curl back like flower petals leaving a white center.

There's a fine recipe for Sally Lunn in your green cookbook, so I won't dwell on that.

And now here we are at the salad course. Sunbonnet Sue salad, just as quaint and pretty as its name. This is a novelty salad, meant just for special occasions like this. Shall I give you the recipe? It's not in the cookbook so you may want it for your notebook.

Just six ingredients.

5 halves of cooked or canned pears or peaches
10 whole cloves
10 almonds, blanched
5 thin slices of pimiento
5 tablespoons of mayonnaise or stiff yellow cooked salad dressing, and
5 leaves of curly lettuce

Just enough ingredients to serve five people. I'll repeat them. (Repeat.)

First, arrange the halves of fruit round side up on the lettuce leaves. The leaf curls up around the fruit, you see, and forms the sunbonnet. Now place the cloves in the fruit for eyes, and the blanched almonds for ears.

iny slices of red canned pimiento will make the nose and mouth. You can make the mouth turn up or down giving Sunbonnet Sue any expression you please.

Now put the salad dressing around the outside of the fruit to represent golden locks. Finally, arrange a bow of red pimiento under the chin. There's Sunbonnet Sue all dressed for the dinner table.

Rhubarb Betty is a bread crumb dessert made with rhubarb. Just a variation from that old favorite, apple Brown Betty. I won't give you the recipe because it's in the green cookbook, page 101. You can make this dessert either with rhubarb sauce or uncooked sliced rhubarb.

That brings us to the last item on the menu -- pinwheel cookies. These fancy, chocolate and white cookies are excellent for any sort of a party when you want wafers that are a little different and very attractive to look at. They're especially nice for afternoon tea. This recipe is also in the green cookbook.

Then you make up a batch of these or any other kind of cookies, be sure to store them in a tightly covered container so that they will keep their crispness. You remember the old cookie jar that used to stand always full in many old-fashioned homes? Sometimes the jar was made of crockery, sometimes china, but it always had a tight cover.

And that reminds me of the nicest little poem about a cookie jar that I read somewhere the other day. I can't remember the author but I'm sure she was a person I'd like to know. Let's see. The little poem goes something like this:

A house should have a cookie jar,
For when it's half-past three
And children hurry home from school
As hungry as can be,
There's nothing quite so pleasant
For filling children up,
As crisp and snappy cookie cakes
And sweet milk in a cup.
A house should have a mother
Waiting with a hug,
No matter what a boy brings home,
A puppy or a bug,
For children only loiter
When the bell rings to dismiss
If no one's home to greet them
With a cookie or a kiss.

Tomorrow: "Pressing Your Spring Clothes."

